

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands in support of House Bill 2628 to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area in Alabama.

PRESENTED BY

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Mr. Chairman, I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before the Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands in support of House Bill 2628 to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area in Alabama.

My name is Alvin Rosenbaum and I am a native of Florence, in the Muscle Shoals area of Alabama, and have been involved with historic preservation issues there for many years. I am the author of a book relating to the area, *Usonia*, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (1993) and serve as a visiting scholar at the International Institute for Tourism Studies, The George Washington University.

I wish to thank historians at the Army Corps of Engineers, and, most particularly, Dr. Leland Johnson, author of *Engineers on the Twin Rivers* (Nashville:1978), for his assistance in preparing this testimony relating to the Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River.

Citizens from the Muscle Shoals region's communities have a long tradition of cooperation and partnership in protecting and presenting their cultural heritage. Permit this brief summary of the setting and circumstances of Muscle Shoals that have contributed to significant events in America's history.

While the major points of my testimony today focus on Tennessee River waterway improvements at Colbert and Lauderdale counties, the Muscle Shoals story also extends into Lawrence County to east and into Franklin County to the south., and the surrounding countryside into Northeastern Mississippi and Southwestern Tennessee.

1. Throughout the Muscle Shoals region's first 200 years of settlement, the theme of improvements has been one of benefit to the entire Tennessee River Valley. An objective was always the ability for goods and people to travel freely the full length of the river and have access to the worlds' markets through New Orleans and domestic markets in Pittsburgh, St. Louis and Memphis. Muscle Shoals became important in the American System of internal improvements as it was first imagined by George Washington and advanced by Alexander Hamilton and Albert Gallatin.
2. The landfall at Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River drops the distance of Niagara Falls, but the drop is not vertical. Instead it cascades down a thirty-mile-long inclined plane, miles of whitewater rapids requiring so much exertion to pass with paddles and oars that the pioneers called them MUSCLE Shoals. Muscle Shoals is the collective place name for a series of three shoals: Big Muscle, Little Muscle, and Elk River Shoals.
3. The Muscle Shoals so obstructed the Tennessee River that it split pioneer settlement and commerce; boats could not pass across the shoals between the upper and lower river sections. This drew federal attention as early as Thomas Jefferson's administration, when the Secretary of Treasury Albert Gallatin recommended that the United States build a canal to carry boats past the Muscle Shoals.

4. The great 18th century wilderness trail, the Natchez Trace, crosses the Muscle Shoals at Waterloo. In the early 19th century, the Jackson Military Road was built and passed through what is now Florence and Russellville, shortening the distance from Nashville to the Port of New Orleans by 200 miles. A hundred years later it was a national highway paved from Chicago to Florence.
5. But before improved highways and railroads, the U. S. Army relied on rivers for troop transport and logistics. Secretary of War John Calhoun in 1820 urged that the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers take control of and improve rivers for both commercial prosperity and national defense. "It is in a state of war," Calhoun argued, "when a nation is compelled to put all of its resources in men, money, skill, and devotion to country into requisition, that its Government realizes in its security the beneficial effects from a people made prosperous and happy by a wise direction of its resources in peace." Calhoun sent the Army Engineers to study the improvement of navigation at Muscle Shoals for national defense.
6. General Simon Bernard made the first survey of Muscle Shoals in 1827. Formerly Napoleon's chief engineer, Bernard fled to the United States after the Battle of Waterloo with a recommendation from Lafayette that he be made an Army Engineer officer.
7. When Gen. Bernard proposed building a canal bypassing Muscle Shoals, Congress gave the State of Alabama 400,000 acres of public land to sell, with the receipts funding construction of the Muscle Shoals canal.
8. Alabama built a canal around Big Muscle Shoals from 1830-1837 that was 12 miles long, 60 feet wide, 6 feet deep, with 17 locks (120 by 32 feet). Funding was exhausted, however, before Alabama built canals around the Little Muscle and Elk River shoals to permit the passage of boats entirely around the shoals. It became necessary therefore to build the first railroad west of the Allegheny Mountains--Tuscumbia Railroad--around Muscle Shoals in 1835 to portage boat cargoes past the obstructions.
9. With the canal left incomplete, the Muscle Shoals posed a major impediment to defense during the Civil War. Navy gunboats could not ascend the shoals to patrol the Upper Tennessee River, leaving the Union Army to Confederate mercy at the Battle of Chickamauga and Siege of Chattanooga. Confederate cavalry forded the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals to attack north into Tennessee. This forced the Union Army to construct its own fleet of gunboats upstream of Muscle Shoals to patrol the river and supply the troops under siege at Chattanooga. At Florence, William Tecumseh Sherman uttered his famous words, "War is hell!"
10. Heeding the war's lessons, Congress in 1872 funded surveys and construction of a canal bypassing Muscle Shoals. There, Captain George Washington Goethals completed the 16-mile-long canal with 11 locks, the longest steamboat canal in the world, and in 1890, also designing canal locks with the highest lift in the world at Riverton, Alabama. Commanding the Engineer District at Florence, Alabama, was Goethals' principal training for managing the Panama Canal's construction.
11. The canal served as an interstate defense highway for commerce until the First World War, when German submarines threatened to sink ships bringing imported nitrates for munitions to the United States. Congress, in the National Defense Act of 1916, ordered the Corps of Engineers to build Wilson Locks and Dam, named for Woodrow Wilson, to generate hydroelectric power to make nitrates for weapons.
12. Support for Wilson Dam was gained from Wilson's isolationist Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, and the American Farm Bureau through an understanding that after the war the nitrates production would be used for fertilizer for agriculture.
13. In 1918 the Corps of Engineers began construction of Wilson Locks and Dam to submerge the Muscle Shoals, opening the Upper Tennessee River to navigation while also generating electric power for two munitions plants

built at Muscle Shoals. The construction of Wilson Locks and Dam continued after the First World War until it was completed in 1927. Built for national defense, Wilson Locks and Dam was the first federal project for hydroelectric production, and it was perhaps the largest dam in the world at its completion.

14. When president-elect Franklin Roosevelt visited Wilson Dam and the Muscle Shoals in 1933, he said it inspired his concept of creating a "Tennessee Valley Authority to develop the entire river basin for hydroelectric power production and allied purposes," calling Muscle Shoals "the Genesis of a new America." TVA took control of the Tennessee River and its Muscle Shoals in 1933 and moved swiftly ahead with river and resource development.

15. At the onset of the Second World War, President Roosevelt and Congress authorized the rushed construction of more power dams by TVA to generate electric power for national defense. The emergency need was to produce aluminum for military aircraft and to power the huge nuclear separation plants at Oak Ridge. Thus the water power at Muscle Shoals and on the Tennessee River made significant contributions to defense of the nation.

16. Additional demands for hydroelectric power, especially at the Oak Ridge and Paducah nuclear separation plants, resulted in the urgent completion of all dams on the Tennessee River along with steam electric plants for national defense during the Cold War. The locks and dams on the Tennessee and at Muscle Shoals not only produced vital power, they also afforded economical transport of coal and strategic materials for national defense, contributing to successful conclusion of the international Cold War.

17. Promoting economic prosperity and national defense, the Muscle Shoals developments had key roles in both commercial-industrial and strategic-military developments throughout American history. The Muscle Shoals rationale that prosperous people constitute the first line of national defense was tested and proven many times.

The Muscle Shoals region today co-joins a number of National Park Service units and projects, including the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail (Southern route); the Natchez Trace National Scenic Trail; the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Historic Preservation Study; and the subject of numerous Historic American Building Survey projects in 1935-6 and Historic American Engineering Record projects at Wilson Dam in 1994-6. Also included in the region is the Corinth Unit of the Shiloh National Military Park. The region has more than a dozen National Register districts and hundreds of buildings on the National Register of Historic Places.

Muscle Shoals regional identity has evolved from the related traditions of its river culture. The legacy of Muscle Shoals extends to significant episodes in the lives of many other great American figures from Andrew Jackson and John Coffee, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and Frank Lloyd Wright. It has been home to American Farm Bureau president Edward O'Neal III, and five Alabama Governors.

Henry Ford's 1921 utopian plan for Muscle Shoals, his "75 Mile City," was the inspiration for Frank Lloyd Wright's regional plan for America, Broadacre City. The landfall at Muscle Shoals has served as a fulcrum for two centuries of public works planning and development, providing a framework for regional watershed planning in America.

The Muscle Shoals' location as a gateway and an East-West link has produced a rich history that has spawned regional expression in music, home-crafts, domestic architecture, and common traditions that have flowed to both banks of the Tennessee River, not only creating a regional identity but also highlighting the distinctiveness of each of the region's communities.

Significant contributions to the history and legacy of the 20th century in America have been made by Muscle Shoals sons and daughters, including Helen Keller and W. C. Handy, Pulitzer Prize winning author T.S. Stribling, Olympic athlete Jesse Owens, and educator Maud Lindsay. Others also have roots in the Shoals' communities,

including well-known actors, writers, and playwrights, artists and photographers, congressmen, legislators, and jurists.

Florence, Alabama at the Muscle Shoals is the birthplace of W. C. Handy (1873-1958), composer, performer, teacher, and historian of the American Jazz tradition. While Handy is best known for his *St. Louis Blues*, his major contribution was in laying the foundation for a musical style that gave rise to America's commercial entertainment industry, spanning recordings, broadcasting, film, and live performance.

The contemporary expression of W. C. Handy's legacy, according to music historian Peter Guralnick, emerged in the 1950s "[to accompany] the Civil Rights Movement almost step by step, its success directly reflecting the strides that integration was making, its popularity almost a mirror of the social changes taking place." (*Sweet Soul Music*, 1986, New York, p. 2). Florence native Sam Philips founded Sun Records in Memphis, launching Elvis Presley's career in the 1950s; by the 1970s, the action moved back to the Shoals, where nearly every top recording star came to record, from Muscle Shoals locals Arthur Alexander and Percy Sledge, Wilson Pickett to the Allman Brothers, the Rolling Stones to Cher, Simon and Garfunkel to Willie Nelson. Also of particular interest is the contributions of the region's native sons to American music history that influenced contemporary music with the contributions of Sam Phillips, Buddy Killen, and James D. Vaughn, world famous studios and other local personalities.

The Muscle Shoals region continues to recognize its past as it prepares for its future. For example, the City of Florence has undertaken a long-term waterfront improvement program, including an outdoor amphitheatre, biking and hiking trails, a marina, public riverside walks and spaces, and the restoration of a Frank Lloyd Wright house. A new bridge crossing the river is nearing completion with intermodal connectors to road and trail systems in Colbert County and through the TVA Reservation, also providing linkages to the Natchez Trace, Trail of Tears interpretation nodes, Civil War sites, and other major cultural assets along the Tennessee River.

A Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area Study is an initiative to seek ways and strategies to tie these assets together, to better protect natural and cultural resources of national significance while making them available to both residents and visitors, to develop and burnish a coherent regional identity, and to develop opportunities for region-wide interpretation of its diverse populations and rich cultural history.

Prospectively, the components of a Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area Study may contain:

- Executive summary and national significance justification
- A physical description of the Muscle Shoals region and origins of settlement
- Themed narratives
- A synthesis of the themed narratives
- Historic resources inventory and analysis
- Summary of HABS (1935-36) and HAER (1994-96) studies
- A map of proposed boundaries

In considering a project focus, team, and strategy for a study, prospectively, themes may revolve around the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals and include narrative histories relating to archeology, music, public works, and agriculture. The faculties at the University of North Alabama at Florence, Dr. Leland Johnson, an historian for the Nashville District, US Army Corps of Engineers, and the Public History Department at Middle Tennessee State University have been consulted and stand ready to provide substantive contributions to the necessary historical documentation for this study. Other sources that may be consulted include the TVA archives and historic preservation office at Norris, TN; Goethals Papers, Library of Congress; National Coordinating Council for the Promotion of History; Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY; Society for the History of the Federal Government; Public Works Historical Society, National New Deal Preservation Association.

In addition, a number of other expert resources for important sub-themes have been identified:

Archaeology - Alabama Historical Commission, University of Alabama, and the State of Alabama Archaeologist have recommendations relating to pre-historic and Native American cultures in Northwest Alabama.

Music - The 20th century American music theme will require a thoughtful narrative history built around the W. C. Handy story and into his influences on contemporary music. Dr. Tom Wolfe, Chair, Jazz Studies, University of Alabama and Sheffield native Willie Ruff, Yale University Department of Music, may be consulted. The Alabama State Council on the Arts is another valuable resource. In the Shoals, journalists Terry Pace, Robert Palmer, William Jarnigan and others have expert knowledge of the area's music heritage. Valuable resources in the areas include the Alabama Music Hall of Fame, Muscle Shoals Music Association, and the Music Preservation Society.

Agriculture - for example, the Alabama Historical Commission is contemplating a state heritage area in North Alabama, anchored by their two properties, Belle Mont in Tuscumbia and the Wheeler Plantation, Pond Spring, in Courtland.

Legislation to authorize a study should contain justification of the national significance of the Muscle Shoals region, including themes receiving wide support from the community. This study assumes a certain urgency in the face of substantial development pressures and an increasing recognition by the public, political leadership, and business that an integrated regional strategy for resource protection and interpretation is essential to their communities' well-being.

I urge you to support House Bill 2628 to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to study the suitability and feasibility of establishing the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area in Alabama. This designation will provide the communities of the Muscle Shoals region a mechanism for planning, and stewardship to conserve and preserve this nationally significant landscape, to encourage new partnerships, and to help return the Tennessee River and its rich cultural and natural resources to its rightful place in Alabama's and our nation's history.

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